

Former Kansas City official to head Cleveland water unit

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Plain Dealer Reporter 7.29.11

The former interim director of the Kansas City Water Department, who left the job after 14 months, was named Thursday as the new head of the Cleveland Water Department.

Bernardo Garcia was selected by Mayor Frank G. Jackson from a local and national pool of 22 candidates compiled by a consulting agency. That list was eventually narrowed to Garcia and Charles W. Kiely, assistant general manager with DC Water in the Washington, D.C., area.

Garcia is to be paid \$175,000 and is slated to start in mid-August, according to a news release from Cleveland City Hall.

Kansas City news accounts said

Garcia had a run-in with the acting city manager, Troy Schulte, and was forced out by him in May 2010 after 14 months on the job.

The official reason given by the city for Garcia's resignation was that he wanted to pursue other interests and spend time with his family.

Garcia was described in stories by the Kansas City Star as hard-charging and abrasive. Shortly before resigning, he was suspended with pay amidst an investigation of an employee's complaint against him.

Those allegations and findings were sealed as part of his departure.

Maureen Harper, a spokeswoman for Jackson, said the mayor was aware of Garcia's troubles in Kansas City, Mo.

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"His background was thoroughly reviewed," Harper said. "He went through an extensive interview process, and we believe he is the right man for the job."

Jackson has sole authority to appoint the commissioner of water and does not need confirmation from City Council.

Garcia replaces J. Christopher Nielson, who retired in December.

Cleveland's Water Department serves 1.5 million customers in 70 communities in five counties.

Council member Kevin Kelley, head of the council's public utility's committee, was unavailable for comment.

Reports said Garcia oversaw switching Kansas City's billing last year from bi-monthly to monthly, but failed to mention a service charge increase, an oversight that angered customers.

The newspaper praised Garcia for canceling a two-month-old, \$100,000 public relations contract and giving the money to the Kansas City Park Department to keep city fountains running.

He also oversaw Kansas City's sewage treatment and won praise

for pressing to improve customer service — a problem Cleveland's Water Department has been struggling to correct.

Garcia lives in Riverview, Fla.

"It is an honor to be selected as the new commissioner of water," Garcia said in the city's press release. "While there are challenges ahead, I view this an excellent opportunity to address and resolve them."

Garcia and his wife, Ines, filed for bankruptcy in 2009. Federal court documents listed \$1.8 million in liabilities, mostly for investment properties in Florida.

Before taking the Kansas City job in March 2009, he worked nine years in Hillsborough County in Florida, the last three as assistant county administrator for development and infrastructure. He also served as the director of public works in both Nueces (Corpus Christi) and Frio counties in Texas. In the latter, he also served as county engineer, according to the news release. From 1975 to 1985, Garcia was a captain in the Army Corps of Engineers.

He earned a bachelor of science degree in civil engineering from Texas Tech University and took graduate course work in civil engineering at the University of New Mexico.

Plain Dealer reporter Thomas Ott contributed to this story.

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